Jackson Goes to Prison To Visit James Earl Ray

FROM PRESS DISPATCHES

PETROS, Tenn. (AP) — The Rev. Jesse Jackson, saying he believes James Earl Ray's life is in danger, headed to Brushy Mountain Penitentiary today to meet behind prison walls with the convicted slayer of Martin Luther King Jr.

"Because Ray is the Jack Ruby in this situation, I believe his life is in jeopardy," Jackson told newsmen last night at nearby Knoxville. "We believe he is in danger whether he is in Washington or Tennessee."

A former aide to King and head of the Chicago-based Operation PUSH, Jackson said his visit to Brushy Mountain is aimed at helping generate public pressure that would force the state of Tennessee to give Ray a new trial.

In another development, Warden Stonney Lane confirmed today that he received information within the last few months that Ray might be plotting another escape from the prison at Petros.

Ray escaped June 10, 1977, with six other inmates. All were recaptured in the mountains surrounding the prison.

"I don't remember exactly when it was I got the information that Ray might be planning another escape," Lane said. "It was somewhere in the last three or four months. The TBI (Tennessee Bureau of Criminal Identification) was handling it But we didn't do anything special here.

"We just went about our usual precautions with Ray," Lane said.

In exchange for a 99-year prison term rather than the death penalty, Ray pleaded guilty in 1969 to murdering King on April 4, 1968, while the civil rights leader was standing on a motel balcony in Memphis.

At the trial, Ray refused to agree with a prosecution contention that he acted alone, and three days later he tried unsuccessfully to withdraw his plea. Since then, he repeatedly has denied that he fired the bullet that killed King.

"The substance of the information indicates that he was at least involved," Jackson said. "We must pursue every possible lead to find out who was involved and what their motives were."

Jackson, who was with King in Memphis and is one of a dozen black leaders Ray requested in June to help him win a new trial, would not tell reporters what specific questions he wants Ray to answer.

"The information he gives us will determine just how vigorously we will pursue his getting back to court," Jackson said. "I hope we get information of substance that will make a difference."

Jackson said what Ray knows and unreleased FBI files could establish that King's death was caused by a conspiracy possibly involving the FBI

"The role of the FBI in the assassination of Dr. King keeps coming back again and again," he said. "We shall never be satisfied until we can reconcile the motives of the FBI's character assassination of Dr. King."

With Jackson were Alvin Toussaint, a Harvard psychologist and director of Operation PUSH, and the Rev. James Lawson, the minister who asked King to come to Memphis in 1968 to support a city garbage strike.

Ray's attorney, Mark Lane, said he planned to work with Ray today on what he will say before the House Assassinations Committee next Wednesday.

Lane backed an earlier report from Ray's brother, Jerry, that Rep. Harold Sawyer, R-Mich., offered to request a commutation on Ray's behalf if he confessed to killing King and named the others involved.

The offer was turned down, Lane said. Sawyer was one of four members of the House Assassinations Committee who interviewed Ray at Brushy Mountain on June 21.

MEMPHIS PRESS-SCIMITAR, THURSDAY, AUGUST 10, 1978